BRILL

ARABICA 65 (2018) 1-30

Arabica

brill.com/arab

Muḥammad as an Episcopal Figure

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Abstract

The Medinan stratum of the Qur'ān ascribes to Muḥammad a noticeably elevated status and a far wider range of functions than the earlier Meccan layer. Although this shift may well have responded to, and been facilitated by, historical circumstances, it is nonetheless appropriate to inquire whether specific aspects of it might be drawing on pre-Qur'ānic precedents. I argue that the Christian episcopate, arguably the most widespread type of urban religious leadership in late antiquity, yields a surprising number of close overlaps with the Medinan presentation of the function and authority of Muḥammad. In tandem with this assessment, however, the article also considers important differences between the figure of Muḥammad and that of the Christian bishop. The most important such divergence consists in the fact that the Qur'ānic Messenger, unlike a Christian bishop, does not owe his authority to ordination by an ecclesiastical hierarchy: Muḥammad does not occupy an office that imparts authority independently of the person occupying it.

Keywords

Qur'ān, Muḥammad, Medinan suras, bishops, episcopate, Christianity, late antiquity, Constitution of Medina

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* This article, submitted in October 2016, has emerged from a paper delivered at the symposium *Representations of Muhammad*, held on 24 October 2015 at the University of Edinburgh. The Bible is quoted according to the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised; my translations of Qur'ānic passages are based on Alan Jones (transl.), *The Qur'ān*, Cambridge, Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007. Work on this article was supported by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (grant reference AH/M011305/1).

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Résumé

Le substrat médinois du Coran attribue à Muḥammad un statut particulièrement élevé et un éventail de fonctions bien plus large que la période mecquoise. Bien que ce changement ait pu répondre et être facilité par des circonstances historiques, il est néanmoins approprié de se demander si des aspects spécifiques de celui-ci pourraient s'appuyer sur des précédents pré-coraniques. Je soutiens que l'épiscopat chrétien, sans doute le type de direction religieuse citadine le plus répandu dans l'Antiquité tardive, donne un nombre surprenant d'étroites coïncidences avec la présentation de la fonction et de l'autorité de Muḥammad à Médine. Cependant, parallèlement à cette appréciation, l'article relève également d'importantes différences entre la figure de Muḥammad et celle de l'évêque chrétien. La plus importante distinction réside dans le fait que le messager coranique, contrairement à un évêque chrétien, ne doit pas son autorité à une ordination par une hiérarchie ecclésiastique : Muḥammad n'occupe pas un office qui confère une autorité indépendamment de la personne qui l'occupe.

Mots clefs

Coran, Muḥammad, sourates médinoises, évêques, épiscopat, christianisme, Antiquité tardive, charte de Médine

Introduction

Notwithstanding several attempts to envisage the formative history of Islam differently than traditionally retold, it remains by far the most probable view that the texts collected in the Qur'ān were first promulgated by an individual called Muḥammad in early seventh-century Western Arabia.[1] Yet Muḥammad did not merely deliver the Qur'ān, he also has a profound literary presence within it. While the Islamic scripture does not contain any narratives about Muḥammad in the vein of its accounts of previous divine emissaries such as Abraham or Moses, a host of Qur'ānic passages address the Prophet in the second person singular or make third-person statements about him. Despite

1 For a concise outline of the reasons behind this assertion, see Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press ("The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys"), 2017, p. 40-77. Note that I do admit the possibility of a certain amount of posthumous editing of Muḥammad's revelatory deposit.

previous work on this material,[2] it presents significant potential for further analysis. Pursuing this task requires one to navigate certain methodological pitfalls that are entailed by the literary nature of the textual data under consideration. Especially the Qurʾān's second-person addresses of Muḥammad create a temptation to construe them as a sort of inverse diary. Thus, when Kor 9, 85 enjoins Muḥammad not to be impressed by the wealth and children of those who fail to follow him into battle, one might infer that he must have harboured an "attraction for wealth and children"; and when Kor 6, 107 and other passages insist that Muḥammad is not responsible for those who reject his preaching, one might conclude that "he felt a need to do more than just deliver the message."[3] Applied across the board, such a psychologising reading would yield a somewhat maudlin characterisation of Muḥammad according to which the many Qurʾānic passages that fortify and console him (*e.g.* Kor 30, 60 or 68, 2-7) indicate frequent bouts of prophetic dejection.

Yet it is appropriate to be very sceptical about such attempts to derive introspective biographical data from the Qurʾān. Instead, it seems far more likely that second-person addresses to Muḥammad, just like third-person statements about him, have primarily a prophetological purport: they would have conveyed to Muḥammad's audience certain ideas about his person, function, and authority, ideas that deserve to be analytically deconstructed and historically contextualised. This is well illustrated by the Qurʾānic proclamations' marked preoccupation with comforting and solacing Muḥammad in the face of miscellaneous aspersions and opposition. Rather than treating the relevant passages as divine pep talks for Muḥammad's individual consumption, they are more interestingly read as invocations of the Biblical topos of the suffering prophet. The latter is most vividly embodied by the so-called Confessions of Jeremiah, a sequence of five laments found in Jeremiah 11-20 in which the prophet poignantly bemoans the resistance and enmity he faces and wonders whether God has abandoned him.[4] Admittedly, the Qurʾān nowhere mentions the figure of Jeremiah. Yet this does not preclude that the general motif of the rejected and despised man of God could have been well known in the Qurʾānic

2 The most useful survey remains Alford T. Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself: The Koranic Data," in *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis, Malibu, Undena Publications, 1983, p. 15-52.

3 Both examples are found in *ibid.*, p. 24-25 and 37-38.

4 The relevant passages are Jeremiah 11, 18 to 12, 6; 15, 10-21; 17, 14-18; 18, 18-23; and 20, 7-18; see the brief overview of previous research in Erich Zenger, Christian Frevel, Heinz-Josef Fabry *et al.* (eds), *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, Stuttgart, Verlag W. Kohlhammer ("Studienbücher Theologie", 1/1), 2004[5], p. 461-462.

milieu, especially in view of the fact that at least some of the relevant passages from the book of Jeremiah were used as scriptural readings in church services.[5] It is pertinent in this regard that the Confessions of Jeremiah formally conform to the Psalmic genre of the individual lament (*e.g.* Psalm 13), while the three brief consolatory suras 93, 94, and 108 can be analysed as targeted inversions of this genre, insofar as they substitute human lamentation by divine words of consolation.[6] Qur'ānic consolations of Muḥammad are therefore sophisticated literary creations speaking to a wider audience rather than just personal words of solace.

It follows that even if we are not inclined to doubt Muḥammad's historical existence and his link with the Qur'ānic proclamations, we should not expect the Qur'ān to provide us with privileged access to his inner life but rather to project certain literary and public images of him. The present article aims to contribute to our understanding of the prophetology inherent in the Medinan suras of the Qur'ān and attempts to explore whether we can pinpoint specific

5 See, for instance, Francis Crawford Burkitt, *The Early Syriac Lectionary System*, London, The British Academy-Oxford University Press, 1923, p. 30 (according to which the beginning of Jeremiah 12 was read on the evening of Good Friday and parts of Jeremiah 16-17 were read during the week after Easter).

6 According to Gunkel's analysis, important components of the genre of the individual lament are the complaint or lament proper (Psalm 13, 1-2: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?…"), the petition (Psalm 13, 3-4: "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!…"), the confession of trust (Psalm 13, 5: "But I trusted in your steadfast love …"), and a concluding vow (Psalm 13, 6: "I will sing to the Lord …"). See Hermann Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*, ed. Joachim Begrich, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985[4], p. 172-265. Allowing for the fact that the three Qur'ānic suras in question feature a divine voice addressing a human individual rather than a human voice invoking God, several of their formal components directly correspond to and invert standard components of Psalmic laments: the complaint or lament corresponds to reminders of past benefactions that God has bestowed upon the addressee (Kor 93, 6-8; 94, 1-4; 108, 1); the petition corresponds to promises of divine reward and assistance (93, 3-5; 94, 5-6; 108, 3), and the concluding vow corresponds to moral and liturgical biddings (93, 9-11; 94, 7-8; 108, 2). These correspondences become even more relevant if we bear in mind, first, that the Biblical Psalms were widely used in Jewish and Christian worship, and, second, that the three suras in question employ not only Psalmic literary forms but also identifiable Psalmic motifs. For example, as Angelika Neuwirth points out, the "hater" (*šāni'*) who figures in Kor 108, 3 corresponds to the Psalmic voice's frequent complaints about the machinations of his enemies and obviously forms the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew term *śonē'* / Syriac *sānē* (*e.g.* Psalm 9, 14). See Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. 1, *Frühmekkanische Suren: Poetische Prophetie*, Berlin, Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011, p. 196 ff. The presence of further Psalmic motifs in Kor 93, 94, and 108 is pointed out in Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, 1, p. 77-95 and p. 106-112.

precedents for it. In pursuing this inquiry, I take for granted my argument elsewhere that it is possible to isolate a specifically Medinan stratum of the Qur'ān based merely on the distinct stylistic, terminological, and thematic profile of the texts in question. I also assume that it can be shown, likewise without substantial reliance on post-Qur'ānic tradition, that the Qur'ān's Medinan layer is chronologically posterior to the Meccan one.[7]

The Admonitory Prophetology of the Meccan Qur'ān

Although both the Meccan and the Medinan suras are united in describing Muḥammad as God's "Messenger" (*rasūl*), the Qur'ānic understanding of his role undergoes a perceptible reconfiguration in the Medinan part of the corpus.[8] In order to grasp this shift, we must briefly consider Muḥammad's presentation in the Meccan Qur'ān.[9] There, Muḥammad's function is largely confined to the task of relaying divine warnings. Thus, he is commanded to "admonish" (*ḏakkara*, *e.g.* Kor 6, 70; 14, 5; 50, 45; 52, 29; 87, 9; and 88, 21) and to "warn" (*anḏara*, *e.g.* 6, 51; 42, 7; 46, 12; 71, 17; and 74, 2) his audience and to "give glad tidings" (*baššara*, *e.g.* Kor 19, 97; 36, 11; 45, 8; and 84, 24) both of the paradisiacal reward that awaits the pious and of the "painful punishment" that is merited by those who fail to heed God's moral and religious imperatives.[10]

7 See Nicolai Sinai, "The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur'an," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 66 (2015-2016), p. 47-96. My own delineation of the Medinan corpus largely overlaps with that of Weil and Nöldeke, even though I remain unsure about how to allocate Kor 61, 64, 98, and 110. See Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträßer and Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur'ān*, transl. Wolfgang H. Behn, Leiden, Brill ("Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān", 8), 2013, p. 135-188.

8 This is not a novel observation: for instance, Alford Welch has remarked that Muḥammad's "power and responsibilities" were at first "said to be limited in various ways" but "later are portrayed as being greatly increased." See Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself," p. 35.

9 On the following see also the summary characterisation of Muḥammad's image in the early Qur'ān put forward in Hartmut Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets': Towards an Understanding of Muhammad's Prophethood," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Literary and Historical Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, eds Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, Leiden-Boston, Brill ("Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān", 6), 2010, p. 565-583, at p. 569.

10 Although the literal meaning of *baššara* is "to give glad tidings" (cf. the noun *bušrā* as used *e.g.* in Kor 2, 97; 3, 126; and 8, 10), the Qur'ān stereotypically joins the verb *baššara* to the object "a painful punishment" (*'aḏāb alīm*, *e.g.* Kor 3, 21; 4, 137; 9, 34; 45, 8; 84, 24). This concatenation would originally have had a sardonic resonance ("Give them the glad

In line with such diction, Muḥammad himself is defined as a "warner" (*naḏīr* or *munḏir*, *e.g.* Kor 17, 105; 25, 56; 38, 4.65; 46, 9; 50, 2; 51, 50-51; 67, 26),[11] as a "bearer of eschatological tidings" (*bašīr* or *mubaššir*, see Kor 11, 2; 17, 105; 25, 56), and in one place also as an "admonisher" (*muḏakkir*, Kor 88, 21). The understanding of Muḥammad's messengership that can be discerned here is best labelled as *admonitory*: Muḥammad's task consists in the "transmission" (*balāġ*) of God's message (*e.g.* Kor 42, 48; 72, 23); he is explicitly dispensed from any further function, such as attempting to coerce his audience into heeding his message (Kor 50, 45; 88, 21-22). As Kor 42, 48 puts it, "If they turn away—We have not sent you as a guardian over them. Your sole duty is to transmit."[12]

The Meccan suras' admonitory prophetology is not limited to Muḥammad: many earlier messengers are presented as performing the same role. These include the non-Biblical prophet Ṣāliḥ, who, according to Kor 46, 21, "warned his people," like other warners "before him and after him." Noah, too, was instructed: "Warn your people before a painful punishment comes upon them" (Kor 71, 1). And, in Kor 29, 18, Abraham underscores that "the messenger's sole duty is to transmit clearly." The fact that the Qurʾān has the messengers prior to Muḥammad express themselves in the same diction as he has not gone unnoticed.[13] It is important, however, not to conceptualise this exclusively in

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tidings of a painful punishment!"), although the verb's formulaic employment together with a reference to damnation may gradually have weakened this. See also Devin Stewart, "Poetic Licence and the Qur'anic Names of Hell: The Treatment of Cognate Substitution in al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's Qur'anic Lexicon," in *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicology and Qur'anic Exegesis*, ed. Stephen R. Burge, Oxford, Oxford University Press ("Qur'anic Studies Series", 13), 2015, p. 195-253, at p. 196-198.

11 Cf. Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself," p. 41.

12 In addition to commands to admonish and warn, the Meccan suras also contain a number of liturgical and ethical biddings in the second person singular; cases in point are, for instance, Kor 87, 1, 93, 9-11, or 94, 7-8. See Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 2003², p. 100, 109-110, 121-122. Even if one retains the traditional identification of their second-person addressee with the Qurʾānic Messenger, such liturgical and ethical imperatives, unlike commands to engage in prophetic admonishment, do not look as if they are meant to apply exclusively to the Messenger. Rather, they would appear to extend to the latter's adherents as well. Their purport is consequently not so much prophetological as *pistological*: they serve to convey general ideas about the nature of faith and the human-divine relationship.

13 *E.g.* Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin-Leipzig, Walter de Gruyter ("Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients", 4), 1926, p. 8-9, 11, 18, and Karl Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa: Strukturanalytische und theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den mekkanischen Musa-Perikopen des Qur'ān*, Altenberge,

terms of the retrospective imposition of certain given traits of Muḥammad onto earlier figures. Instead, it would be just as true to say that Muḥammad's image is cast in the mould of existing prophetological paradigms.[14] After all, the Meccan Qurʾān's admonitory prophetology has strong roots in the Biblical tradition prior to the Qurʾān. Thus, already pre-Qurʾānic Jewish and Christian texts portray Noah as calling his contemporaries to repent.[15] (One may observe that this amounts to a significant transformation of the Biblical Noah, for Genesis 6 does not report him to have made any attempt to convince others to mend their ways.) Earlier literature likewise depicts Abraham and Moses, two of the earliest Biblical figures mentioned in the Qurʾān,[16] as preaching to an obstinate and unbelieving audience.[17]

Muḥammad's Status and Function in the Constitution of Medina

Turning to the Medinan suras, we find that expressions of the admonitory understanding of Muḥammad's messengership just outlined persist to some degree. Especially the verb *baššara* has a significant number of Medinan occurrences (see among others Kor 2, 25.155.223; 3, 21; and 4, 138). Similarly, Medinan verses continue to designate Muḥammad as a "bearer of eschatological tidings" and a "warner" (*e.g.* Kor 2, 119; 5, 19), and it is reiterated that his sole responsibility lies in faithfully transmitting God's message (*e.g.* Kor 3, 20;

Christlich-islamisches Schrifttum, 1986, p. 26 ("daß sich nämlich in der Person des Musa Muhammad selbst abbildhaft darstellt").

14 See the remarks in Devin J. Stewart, "Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qurʾān," in *Qurʾānic Studies Today*, eds Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, Abingdon, Routledge ("Routledge Studies in the Qurʾān"), 2016, p. 17-51, at p. 30-31.

15 Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Hildesheim-Zürich, Georg Olms Verlag, 1988 (originally published Breslau, Marcus, between 1937 and 1939, but misattributed Gräfenhainichen, C. Schulze, 1931, in order to circumvent the Nazi ban on Jewish publications), p. 94-95; James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 185-186.

16 See Kor 53, 36-37; 79, 15-26; and 87, 18-19. Other early verses mention only Pharaoh: Kor 85, 18 and 89, 10.

17 Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, p. 134-138 (Abraham arguing against the idolatry of his compatriots) and p. 270-272 (Moses preaching to Pharaoh); on Abraham see also Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, p. 245-249. Especially with regard to Moses, the Qurʾān admittedly goes much further in its emphasis on the latter's role as a preacher as opposed to the liberator of the Israelites. See Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa*, p. 271 (citing Johan Bouman on the Moses pericope in Kor 28).

5, 92.99). Furthermore, Kor 42, 48, cited above,[18] has more than one close Medinan parallel (Kor 3, 20; 4, 80; 5, 92; see also 5, 99; 24, 54; 64, 12?).[19] At the same time, such admonitory statements coexist with others that bespeak a tangible elevation of Muḥammad's status and a significant broadening of his functions and responsibilities. The development can be summarised by saying that Muḥammad is now explicitly credited with a novel role of political and religious communal leadership.

Before reviewing the different aspects of this Medinan reconfiguration of the figure of Muḥammad, it is of interest to examine the status of Muḥammad in the so-called Constitution of Medina, a covenant reportedly concluded by Muḥammad upon his arrival at Medina. Many scholars have explicitly accepted this document as authentic, and even though the question would merit re-examination, I am not at present minded to doubt the consensus in favour of its authenticity.[20] The text describes itself as "a document by Muḥammad the Prophet between the Believers and Submitters of Qurayš and Yaṯrib and those who follow them, attach themselves to them, and engage in military struggle with them" (§ 1).[21] Like the Medinan layer of the Qur'ān, the Constitution of Medina presents us with a community (*umma*) (§ 2) that is composed of the Meccan "Emigrants" (§ 3) and various other tribal groups, is defined in religious terms,[22] and is engaged in "fighting in the path of God" (§ 19 and 21). Given such broad similarities between the Constitution and the Medinan

18 "If they turn away—We have not sent you as a guardian over them. Your sole duty is to transmit."

19 But note that Kor 4, 80 additionally insists on the duty to obey the Messenger, on which see below.

20 For a monograph-length study, see Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muḥammad's First Legal Document*, Princeton, Darwin Press ("Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam", 23), 2004. The treaty and the arguments for its authenticity are concisely introduced in Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press ("Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization"), 2014, p. 54-56. The unity of the document, which some earlier scholars have doubted, is defended in Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 183-190. My retention of the traditional designation "Constitution of Medina" should be understood as entirely conventional; quite obviously, the text is not a constitution in the modern sense of the term.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 7 (slightly modifying Lecker's translation as given on p. 32).

22 Cf. the treaty's numerous references to "Believers" as well as the use of the terms "Unbeliever" (*kāfir*) in § 15 and "Associator" (*mušrik*) in § 23. Note that § 25 specifies the doctrinal commitments of the Believers by speaking of belief "in God and the Last Day," a common Qur'ānic phrase (*e.g.* Kor 2, 126; 3, 114).

Qurʾān, we might expect Muḥammad, too, to play a comparable role in both texts. Is this the case?

The answer to this question can hardly be unreservedly affirmative. Apart from the superscript just cited, the Constitution mentions Muḥammad only four more times, thereby according him far from the towering presence that he has in many Medinan passages of the Qurʾān. The most significant references to him are two provisos to the effect that "whatever you differ about should be referred to God and Muḥammad" (*fa-inna maraddahu ilā Llāhi wa-ilā Muḥammadin*) and that "every major crime (*ḥadaṯ*) or dispute (*ištiǧār*) between the people of this treaty from which evil is to be feared should be referred to God and Muḥammad" (§ 26 and 52).[23] One may note the conspicuous omission of a prophetic honorific for Muḥammad in these two provisos according to at least some witnesses of the Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767) recension of the text.[24] The Constitution furthermore stipulates that the nomadic allies of the Jewish tribes listed in the document, or perhaps these Jewish tribes themselves, may not leave Medina, or perhaps go on a military campaign, "without Muḥammad's permission" (§ 40).[25] The document's final reference to Muḥammad comes in its conclusion, which states that "God is the protector of him who is righteous and God-fearing, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God" (§ 63).[26]

The "community" (*umma*) created by the Constitution of Medina is a confederation of internally autonomous tribal units. Watt defensibly characterises the fairly limited role that Muḥammad plays in the political structure set out in the document by saying that "Muḥammad as chief of the Emigrants" was "on a level" with the other Medinan clan chiefs, although he may have possessed a "primacy of honour."[27] According to the Constitution, Muḥammad functions largely as a subsidiary arbitrator of last resort for disputes that have proved, or are likely to prove, impossible to settle by means of existing tribal mechanisms for resolving conflicts. This is so despite the prophetic titulature applied to him at the beginning and end of the document (which may betray the

23 Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 35 and 38 (translation slightly modified). On the meaning of the term *ḥadaṯ* see *ibid.*, p. 132 and 173-174. An alternative recension of the first proviso states that disputes "should be *judged* by God and by the Messenger" (*fa-inna ḥukmahu ilā Llāhi wa-ilā l-rasūli*); see *ibid.*, p. 24.

24 For textual variants see Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 14 and 17 as well as p. 24-25.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 37 and 153-157.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 39 opts for an alternative translation: "Allāh is the protector of him who is righteous and God-fearing and so is Muḥammad, the Messenger of God." My rendering follows W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956, p. 225.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

impact of the text's Islamic transmitters, especially in view of its absence in the body of the text, at least according to some witnesses).

Even though it is hardly certain that we may safely rely on the *sīra* literature in dating the Constitution of Medina to the first year after the *hiǧra*, the treaty is not unreasonably considered to document an initial status quo that crystallised relatively soon after the arrival of Muḥammad and his followers at Medina, *i.e.* as a point of departure for subsequent developments that are reflected in the Qur'ān. This is certainly the case as far as relations with Medina's Jewish tribes are concerned. While the Constitution envisages them as religiously independent clients, and perhaps even fully-fledged members, of the *umma*,[28] Kor 5, 51 unequivocally demands that the Believers must not "take Jews and Christians as allies (*awliyā'*). They are allies of each other. Whoever of you takes them as his allies is one of them." The Qur'ān may here be engaged in reshaping the political and religious situation stipulated by the Constitution. It appears that the Medinan suras are similarly engaged in transforming the role of Muḥammad, the general direction of this transformation being a considerable boosting of his authority.

We may not of course assume that the various prerogatives and responsibilities with which the Medinan Qur'ān invests Muḥammad were immediately and fully observed by all of its addressees. It is well possible that at least for a certain time the elevated image of Muḥammad put forward in the passages to be reviewed below remained a programmatic postulate. This conjecture is in fact corroborated by the Medinan Qur'ān's frequent polemics against the so-called "Hypocrites" (*al-munāfiqūn*, see *e.g.* Kor 9, 38-129): the significant amount of text devoted to them is only comprehensible if a considerable part of Medina's population remained hesitant to recognise Muḥammad as more than, at most, the arbitrator of last resort attested by the Constitution of Medina. Evidently, a historically critical reader must resist the Qur'ān's marked tendency to depict such reluctance as deviant, anomalous, and imbued by base motifs. Rather, it may simply have emanated from circles that clung to the status quo enshrined in the Constitution of Medina. It is conceivable that an unreserved willingness

28 The Jewish tribes named in the document are expressly granted the right to retain their own religion (*dīn*); see Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 35. There is disagreement as to whether the text calls the Jewish tribes an *umma ma'a* or an *umma min* the Believers, or whether this should not be emended to something else entirely; for a discussion of text-critical problems surrounding the relevant part of the text see *ibid.*, p. 137-147. I am unconvinced by Lecker's plea in favour of emending *umma* to *amana* and would be inclined to retain the customary understanding of the paragraph in question as stating that the Jews "form one community with the Believers."

to recognise the role that the Medinan suras claim for Muḥammad was at least initially a minority position and only gradually prevailed among a significant number of Medina's inhabitants.

Muḥammad's Status and Functions in the Medinan Qur'ān

What, then, does the Medinan Qur'ān have to say about Muḥammad's role and functions?[29] What is most noticeable from a purely quantitative perspective are formulaic calls to "obey God and His Messenger/the Messenger" (*e.g.* Kor 3, 32.132; 8, 1.20.46).[30] This close association of God and Muḥammad implies that obedience to the latter is identical with obedience to the former, an equation that is indeed explicitly asserted in Kor 4, 80: "Who obeys the Messenger has obeyed God." Incidentally, while the formulaic concatenation of the words *aṭāʿa* + *Allāh* + *al-rasūl/rasūluhū* is characteristically Medinan, the general theme of people's duty of obedience to messengers other than Muḥammad already appears in some Meccan suras. Thus, the narrative part of Kor 26 has Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Šuʿayb address their respective audiences with the command, "Be fearful of God and obey me!" (Kor 26, 108.110.126.131.144.150.163.179). The same command recurs, likewise outside the Medinan corpus, in Kor 43, 63 (Jesus) and Kor 71, 3 (Noah), and has a further parallel in Kor 20, 90 (Aaron).[31] Probably against the background of such earlier passages, the Medinan verse Kor 4, 64 duly generalises: "We did not send any messenger except in order to be obeyed, with God's permission," the divine voice states.

Going beyond a call for mere obedience to the Messenger, Kor 33, 21 describes him as "a good exemplar (*uswatun ḥasanatun*) for those who place their hope on God and the Last Day and invoke God often." The Believers, it appears, are not just meant to submit to explicit commands by Muḥammad but also to imitate and emulate him. The phrase *uswatun ḥasanatun* recurs in Kor 60, 4.6, where "Abraham and those with him" are similarly described as

29 Some of the material in this section is also covered, albeit more summarily, in Sinai, "The Unknown Known."

30 See David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur'anic Study*, Richmond, Curzon, 1999, p. 165-170.

31 But note that non-Medinan suras generally appear to equate obedience to God's messengers with heeding their eschatological message, whereas the Medinan suras express a much more comprehensive understanding of the duty of obedience to Muḥammad. A fascinating verse in this regard is Kor 72, 23, pointed out to me by Andrew O'Connor, who will be doing further work on this topic.

"a good exemplar for those who place their hope on God and the Last Day." In the context of sura 60, Abraham's worthiness to be emulated is tied to a specific act, namely, his dissociation from his idolatrous contemporaries. No such restriction is stated in the case of Kor 33, 21, although Kor 2, 124 calls Abraham an *imām*—here probably meaning an exemplar as well—"for mankind" due to his willingness to carry out God's command of sacrificing his son.[32] Like Abraham, then, the Qur'ānic Messenger is cast as an ethical role model, not just as a source of authoritative instruction.

One aspect of the duty of obedience towards Muḥammad that is specifically highlighted is his entitlement to settle disputes between the Believers, a demand that calls to mind § 26 and 52 of the Constitution of Medina. This expectation is programmatically voiced in Kor 4, 59: "O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those of you who have authority. If you quarrel with one another about anything, then refer it (*ruddūhu*) to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day."[33] The passage then proceeds to criticise those who profess to believe in "what was sent down to you [*i.e.* Muḥammad] and sent down before you," yet "seek out the judgement of the idols" (Kor 4, 60: *yurīdūna an yataḥākamū ilā l-ṭāġūt*).[34] The rationale behind this stark accusation is most likely that submitting to judgements that do not originate from God via Muḥammad is as such an act of idolatry, insofar as it is tantamount to substituting God by a rival source of authority—indeed, is equivalent to yielding to temptation by the devil, as maintained at the end of Kor 4, 60 ("Satan wishes to lead them far astray"). Failing to abide by the command to "come to what God has sent down and to the Messenger" will therefore mark one as belonging to the "Hypocrites" (Kor 4, 61). The root Ḥ.K.M. recurs a few verses later, in Kor 4, 65, which states that "they do not believe until they establish you [*i.e.* Muḥammad] as an adjudicator (*yuḥakkimūnaka*)

32 I assume that Kor 2, 124 refers back to the episode recounted in Kor 37, 99-111.—Cf. the statement that God has made Abraham an *imām* with Kor 16, 120, where Abraham is described as an *umma*, most likely in the same sense. Although Kor 16 mostly fits the stylistic, terminological, and thematic profile of the Meccan Qur'ān, the sura would appear to include a number of Medinan additions towards the end, which may include the verse cluster on Abraham. See Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter ("Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients", 10), 1981, p. 301.

33 A link between Muḥammad's adjudicatory role and the theme of obedience is also made in Kor 24, 51.

34 On the meaning and etymology of the term *ṭāġūt* see concisely Arne Ambros (with the collaboration of Stephan Procházka), *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, Wiesbaden, Reichert, 2004, p. 173.

concerning what is in dispute between them (*fī-mā šağara baynahum*)." To fail to seek Muḥammad's judgement is thus equivalent to unbelief.

The overlap between this passage and the Constitution of Medina is not just limited to the general demand that Muḥammad be recognised as an authoritative arbiter of communal disputes; there are also palpable parallels in diction.[35] Yet in other regards the Qurʾān goes significantly beyond the Constitution of Medina—not only by its massive deployment of religiously charged rhetoric (idolatry, Satan, the question of belief vs. unbelief) but also by positing an intimate nexus between Muḥammad's ability to act as an arbiter and his receipt of divine revelations, which is underscored both in Kor 4, 60 ("what was sent down to you and what was sent down before you") and Kor 4, 61 ("what God has sent down"). It seems obvious that the primary reference of the phrase "what God has sent down" must be to the sizable corpus of Qurʾānic law that came to accumulate over the course of Muḥammad's Medinan period and much of which is now concentrated in suras Kor 2, 142-283 and Kor 4, 1-43.92-93.101-103.127-130.135.176. Some of these passages even style themselves as answering questions posed by Muḥammad's addressees (*e.g.* Kor 2, 189.215.217.219.220.222; 5, 4; 8, 1), thus giving concrete literary embodiment to what it would mean to follow the Qurʾānic injunction to seek judgement by Muḥammad.

The link between Muḥammad's adjudicatory role and his access to revelatory knowledge is also stressed in Kor 5, 48-50, which twice command Muḥammad to "adjudicate between them according to that which God has sent down" (Kor 5, 48 and 49).[36] Kor 5, 50 then contrasts adjudication by Muḥammad with seeking "the judgement of ignorance" (*ḥukm al-ǧāhiliyya*), which presumably means adjudication that is uninformed by revealed knowledge.[37] The term must perform the same rhetorical role as the phrase "seeking the judgement of idols" in Kor 4, 60: both passages are concerned to construct the choice between submitting to Muḥammad's adjudication and failing to do so as a choice between belief and unbelief, or between knowledge and ignorance. By contrast with the Meccan sura's admonitory understanding of Muḥammad's messengership, Muḥammad here appears not merely as the

35 Cf. the Constitution of Medina's demand *fa-inna maraddahu* (alt. *ḥukmahu*) *ilā Llāhi wa-ilā Muḥammadin* (Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 35 and 24) and the Qurʾānic command *fa-ruddūhu ilā Llāhi wa-l-rasūli* (Kor 4, 59) as well as the Constitution's use of the word *ištiǧār* (Lecker, *Constitution*, p. 38) and the Qurʾānic *mā šağara baynahum* (Kor 4, 65).

36 Muḥammad is furthermore warned not to "follow their inclinations away from the truth that has come to you" (Kor 5, 48, similarly Kor 5, 49).

37 On the root Ǧ.H.L, which in its Qurʾānic employment certainly expresses the notion of ignorance, see Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, p. 64.

divinely appointed transmitter of a certain number of theological and ethical doctrines whose content is specifiable without reference to him. Rather, Muḥammad and the need to submit to his authority become a core part of the kerygma he is charged with proclaiming.[38]

It may be pointed out that, unlike sura 4 and the Constitution of Medina, Kor 5, 48-50 does not suggest that Muḥammad's adjudicatory interventions are to be limited to pre-existing disputes. The same is true of a third passage that stresses the need to submit to prophetic adjudication, Kor 24, 48.51. It is possible to view this omission of any reference to communal disputes constituting the precondition for prophetic intervention as extending Muḥammad's adjudicatory role beyond the domain of arbitration. On the other hand, the fact that as late a sura as Kor 5 reiterates Muḥammad's authority to adjudicate between the Believers might also lead one to conclude that the two pertinent provisos of the Constitution of Medina were not routinely respected even at a fairly advanced stage in the Qur'ān's genesis.[39]

Another context in which the request for obedience towards Muḥammad recurs is in connection with the issue of dividing the Believers' spoils of war. Kor 8, 1 claims these spoils (here traditionally understood to be designated by the plural *al-anfāl*) for "God and the Messenger," a demand followed by a string of hortatory commands that once more features the formulaic command to "obey God and His Messenger." Later on, in the same sura (Kor 8, 41), we encounter either a complementary specification or a climb-down according to which only a fifth of "what you gain as booty" (*mā ġanimtum*) belongs to God "and to the Messenger and to relatives and orphans and the poor and the traveller."[40] Muḥammad's entitlement to dispose of part of the Believers' booty is also maintained in Kor 59, 6-8, which deal specifically with spoils obtained in one particular situation. Kor 59, 7 lists the same catalogue of intended beneficiaries as Kor 8, 41 and enjoins the addressees to be content with "what the Messenger gives to you." Evidently, Muḥammad's portfolio of tasks has here come to encompass the distribution of material goods. As Kor 9, 58-60 as well

38 That the person of Muḥammad becomes part of the message proclaimed by him can also be seen in calls to believe in God *and His Messenger* (*e.g.* Kor 49, 15 and 57, 7.19.28).

39 That Kor 5 is one of the latest suras of the Qur'ān is supported by its very high mean verse length (even though the present shape of the text is likely to have a significant redactional pre-history); on mean verse length as a dating criterion and the exact value it takes for Kor 5 see Sinai, *The Qur'an*, p. 111-137, and *id.*, "Inner-Qur'anic Chronology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, eds Muhammad Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

40 The phrase *mā ġanimtum* recurs towards the end of the sura, in Kor 8, 69.

as Kor 9, 103 demonstrate, this distributive role was not limited to spoils of war but also included the Believers' alms (*al-ṣadaqāt*). Kor 9, 60 again comprises a list of intended beneficiaries worthy of charitable support. A final passage that is relevant in this regard is Kor 58, 12-13, which urge payment of a charitable donation prior to private audiences with the Messenger.

The quasi-fiscal role of Muḥammad that is on display in the above passages, and the economic power that was undoubtedly consequent upon it, constitute an unmistakable novelty both compared to the admonitory prophetology of the Meccan Qurʾān and to the Constitution of Medina. The reason why three of the passages asserting Muḥammad's distributory function include lists of needy recipients may well be to dispel the suspicion that Muḥammad might be deriving personal profit from his religious role, given that earlier verses like Kor 6, 90 and Kor 12, 104 had vigorously maintained that he did not demand any wage (*aǧr*) in return for proclaiming God's word.[41]

Medinan passages also attest to formal pledges of allegiance (verb: *bāyaʿa*) to Muḥammad: membership in the community of Believers involved a relationship of personal loyalty to him rather than just the espousal of a certain set of religious doctrines. Kor 48, 10, employing a now familiar equation, maintains that pledging allegiance to Muḥammad is equivalent to pledging allegiance to God (see also Kor 48, 18). The context in sura 48 is military: pledging allegiance to Muḥammad apparently implied being prepared to fight on his side. In line with this, the Medinan Qurʾān frequently calls the Believers to engage in militant "struggling" (*ǧāhada*) or "fighting" (*qātala*) "on the path of God" (*e.g.* Kor 9, 36; 9, 38-57; 9, 81-96; 9, 111; 9, 119-123), diction that we have also encountered in the Constitution of Medina.[42] An explicit stipulation of the obligations entailed by pledging allegiance to Muḥammad is found in Kor 60, 12, dealing specifically with pledges by "believing women." The duties catalogued here include the doctrinal commitment of not associating anything with God as well as moral prohibitions (*e.g.* not stealing, not fornicating, not killing one's children) and, once more, obedience to Muḥammad ("that they will not disobey you in something that is right and proper").

Kor 60, 12 also exemplifies a further dimension of Muḥammad's role by instructing him to "seek God's forgiveness for" the women in question (*wa-staġfir*

41 Another reason is probably to insist that Muḥammad is not guilty of the charge levelled against Jewish and Christian leaders to "wrongfully consume people's possessions" (Kor 9, 34). See Holger M. Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān:* Religious Leaders in the Qurʾān in Dialogue with Christian and Rabbinic Literature," in *Qurʾānic Studies Today*, eds Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells, p. 262-293, as well as below.

42 On militancy in the Medinan Qurʾān, see Sinai, *The Qurʾan*, p. 188-196.

lahunna Llāha). Other passages, too, attribute to the Messenger the role of seeking God's forgiveness for sins committed by members of the Qur'ānic community (Kor 4, 64; 24, 62; 47, 19; 63, 5-6). God's forgiveness, it seems, must be mediated by Muḥammad rather than being directly accessible to ordinary Believers. Presumably, this is also the reason why Muḥammad is tasked with "purifying" (*zakkā*) his followers (Kor 2, 129.151; 3, 164; 62, 2). According to Kor 9, 103, it is specifically by taking "alms (*ṣadaqāt*) from their possessions" that he "purifies and cleanses" the Believers (*tuṭahhiruhum wa-tuzakkīhim bihā*). Muḥammad is then commanded to offer up prayers for the Believers. That he would pray specifically for dead community members is attested by Kor 9, 84. The undeniable upshot of all these verses is to endow Muḥammad with a role bordering on that of a priestly intermediary. It should be noted, though, that Muḥammad's role as a mediator of divine mercy does not, according to the Qur'ān, entail his sinlessness: Medinan texts explicitly acknowledge that Muḥammad, too, is capable of sinning (see Kor 40, 55; 47, 19; and 48, 2).

One expression of the general boost in Muḥammad's status that is discernible in the Medinan Qur'ān is the terminological characteristic that he is now called a "prophet" (*nabī*), a title that Meccan texts generally limit to figures of Biblical history.[43] Application of this title to Muḥammad may have implied some claim of genealogical relationship to the protagonists of Israelite sacred history.[44] After all, the most important prophetic figures in the Qur'ān—Adam, Noah, "the family of Abraham" and "the family of ʿImrān" (namely, Jesus and Mary)—are described as "the seed of one another" (Kor 3, 33-34: *ḏurriyyatun baʿḍuhā min baʿḍin*).[45] Given that sura 14 explicitly styles the Meccans as belonging to the "seed" (*ḏurriyya*) of Abraham (Kor 14, 37), it seems plausible that designating the Qur'ānic Messenger as a "prophet" implied his belonging to the lineage of Abraham. That the Qur'ānic community and their prophet are physically descended from Abraham also emerges very clearly from Kor 2, 128-129. In any case, the title certainly had a connotation of special divine election: as Hartmut Bobzin has shown, it is primarily Biblical figures like Adam, Noah,

43 Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself," p. 43-45; Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets'," especially p. 567-569 and 571-574. A Meccan verse that might at least be taken to imply that Muḥammad is a prophet is Kor 25, 31 ("We have appointed an enemy for every prophet").

44 Willem A. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet and More than a Prophet? Some Observations on the Qur'anic Use of the Terms 'Prophet' and 'Apostle'," *The Muslim World*, 59 (1969), p. 1-28, at p. 16-17.

45 See Bobzin, "The 'Seal of the Prophets'," p. 572.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus whom the Qur'ān describes as having been divinely chosen (by means of the verbs *iṣṭafā*, *iǧtabā*, and *iḫtāra*).[46]

A sura that is particularly replete with assertions of Muḥammad's augmented status is Kor 33, which contains the description of Muḥammad as a "good exemplar" for the Believers discussed above. Not only does sura 33 contain "almost half" of all cases in which the title "prophet" is applied to him,[47] but it also presents him as a quasi-paternal figure to the Believers (Kor 33, 6): "The Prophet is closer to the Believers than they themselves [are to one another], and his wives are their mothers."[48] The following verse, Kor 33, 7, places Muḥammad at the beginning of an otherwise chronological list of prophets from Noah to Jesus, thus implying his pre-eminence over them. Probably the best-known statement made in sura 33 is the characterisation of the Qur'ānic Messenger as the "seal of the prophets" (Kor 33, 40). Traditionally, the phrase is understood to assert that Muḥammad is the final prophet, a construal that has been

46 *Ibid.*, p. 572-573.

47 Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself," p. 43.

48 A reading variant inserts the additional clause: "and he is their father." See Nöldeke *et al.*, *History*, p. 202; Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices*, Leiden, Brill, 1937, p. 75 and 156. Nöldeke and Schwally think that this contradicts Kor 33, 40 ("Muhammad is not the father of any of your men"), yet this is not the case: to be the father of the Believers in their entirety is not the same as being the father of "one of their men" in particular. Uri Rubin points out that the canonical text "is careful not to confer on Muḥammad the title 'father' within the extended family of believers, asserting instead that he is 'nearer (*awlā*) to them than they are to themselves'"; see Uri Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy: On the Interpretation of the Qur'ānic Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33)," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 164 (2014), p. 65-96, at p. 69. Rubin is certainly right in maintaining that the verse conspicuously fails to say something that one would naturally expect to follow from the designation of Muḥammad's wives as "mothers" of the Believers. This is why the variant adding "and he is their father" is more easily viewed as having arisen as a secondary interpretation of the canonical wording of the text. For a further argument against this variant, see Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy," p. 84. I would submit that the primary reason why the text shies away from explicitly calling Muḥammad a "father" of the Believers is due to Kor 33, 4, which justifies the Qur'ānic abolishment of adoption by a critique of the non-literal employment of paternal language. Possibly, the Qur'ān might also be wary of paternal metaphors due to their prominence in Christian discourse (but see Kor 22, 78, speaking of "your father Abraham"). However, even though Kor 33 conspicuously fails to call Muḥammad the "father" of the Believers, it is still defensible to characterise the text as ascribing to him a *quasi*-paternal role: not just because his wives are the Believers' "mothers," but also because his relationship to the Believers is said to override all other relations among them, even real genealogical links.

questioned as a later imposition.[49] Whether or not the seal metaphor connotes the aspect of finality, it is likely that it conveys the idea that Muḥammad fulfils and thereby confirms and validates the announcements of prior prophets: various Medinan passages claim that Muḥammad and his community were predicted in the Torah and the Gospel.[50] Beyond this aspect of confirmation, however, it also seems probable, on purely inner-Qurʾānic grounds, that the seal metaphor is indeed meant to imply finality as well: as pointed out by Uri Rubin on the basis of Arne Ambros' *Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, the verb *ḫatama* ("to seal"), from which the expression for "seal" is derived, generally means "to seal something so that it must remain closed" in the Qurʾān.[51]

Given the singular importance of Muḥammad that emerges from the material surveyed above, it is only fitting that the Medinan Qurʾān should devote attention to the proper etiquette of interacting with Muḥammad and his household, especially with his wives (Kor 24, 62-63; 33, 28-33.53-55; 49, 1-5; 58, 12-13). The strong insistence on honouring and respecting the Messenger that is palpable here also comes through in the demand that he must not be insulted (Kor 9, 61-63; 33, 57). A later verse in sura 33 underpins this by reference to Moses, who functions as a prototype for Muḥammad already in the Meccan Qurʾān.[52] "O you who believe, do not be like those who insulted Moses, and then God declared him innocent of what they said, and he was eminent with God!" (Kor 33, 69) As pointed out already by Heinrich Speyer, the Qurʾān here

49 Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy," p. 75 (citing Friedmann, Madelung, Bobzin, Powers, and Hawting).

50 According to Kor 2, 129, Abraham petitioned God to send a messenger to the Meccans (the fulfilment of which request is affirmed in Kor 2, 151). Kor 3, 81 evokes a scene in which the prophets (primordially?) commited themselves to recognising subsequent prophets who "confirm" their message. Kor 7, 157 speaks of "the gentile (*ummī*) prophet whom they find written in the Torah and the Gospel." According to Kor 48, 29 (which is ultimately inspired by the New Testament's sower parables, see Matthew 13, 1-30 and Mark 4, 26-29), both the Torah and the Gospel contain descriptions (sg. *maṯal*) of Muḥammad's adherents. Finally, Kor 61, 6 has Jesus announce a messenger "whose name will be *aḥmad*."—For an employment of the seal metaphor in the sense of confirmation and validation see the quotation from the *Didascalia Apostolorum* in Holger Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013, p. 171, where the Gospel is described as the "seal" of the Law.

51 Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy," p. 74; Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, p. 83.

52 On the close link between Muḥammad and the figure of Moses, see Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa*, and Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*, Oxford, Oxford University Press ("Qur'anic Studies Series", 10), 2014, p. 277-305.

alludes to an incident reported in chapter 12 of the Biblical book of Numbers, where Moses comes under criticism by Miriam and Aaron for his marriage to a Cushite woman, a constellation which bears some resemblance to the situation in which Muḥammad apparently found himself as a result of his marriage to the former wife of his adoptive son Zayd (Kor 33, 37).[53] This allusion to Numbers suggests that the Messenger re-enacts a Mosaic paradigm not only in Moses' capacity as a warner and admonisher but also insofar Moses functioned as a communal leader who guided the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land.[54] Incidentally, two other Medinan verses (Kor 2, 108 and 4, 153) also present disobeying or doubting the Messenger as equivalent with disobeying or doubting Moses.

Precedents for the Medinan Role of Muḥammad

The Medinan reconfiguration of Muḥammad may well have responded to specific historical circumstances: there may, for instance, have been a leadership vacuum in Medina that Muḥammad was able to fill. Nonetheless, it does not seem unreasonable to suspect the peculiar contours of Muḥammad's role and status in Medina to have been informed by certain precedents or archetypes of communal authority with which at least parts of the Qur'ānic audience would have been familiar. One such archetype is undoubtedly the figure of Moses as the leader of the Israelite polity after the Exodus, briefly touched upon at the end of the previous section. Already the Meccan suras pattern Muḥammad's prophetic experience on that of Moses,[55] and many of the functions that the Medinan Qur'ān ascribes to Muḥammad visibly mirror the role of Moses after the Exodus, who transmits to the Israelites a corpus of revealed laws, leads them in battle (Exodus 17, 8-16, Numbers 21), and oversees the administering of justice among them (Exodus 18, 13-27). In terms of explicit Qur'ānic evidence for such a parallelisation of the Medinan Muḥammad with Moses, there is, first, the invocation of Moses in Kor 33, 69, highlighted above. Secondly, Medinan passages imply that the covenant (*mīṯāq*) that God has concluded with the Israelites corresponds to, and is surpassed by, a new covenant with the Qur'ānic community, whose obedient response to God—"We hear and

53 See Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran*, p. 72-73.

54 The concluding reference to Moses in Kor 33, 96 might be considered to form a complement to Kor 33, 7, which lists Muḥammad alongside various Biblical prophets including Moses.

55 See above, n. 52.

obey!" (*samiʿnā wa-aṭaʿnā*)—contrasts with the Israelites' insubordinate "We hear and disobey" (*samiʿnā wa-ʿaṣaynā*).[56] The fact that the Qurʾān charges its addressees to "remember"(*ḏakara*) the "blessing" (*niʿma*) that God has "bestowed" (*anʿama*) upon them, a command also given by Moses to the Israelites, further reinforces the Mosaic overtones of the Medinan representation of Muḥammad.[57] All of this can be put into some historical context by pointing to Claudia Rapp's observation that late antique Christians viewed Moses as the supreme "model of leadership," uniting a wide range of spiritual, moral, and political aspects.[58] Hence, the fact that the Qurʾān casts Muḥammad in the image of Moses resonates with wider late antique discourses.

Yet despite the Biblical archetype for the Medinan Muḥammad that is constituted by the figure of Moses, one may still wonder whether Muḥammad's authority and prerogatives are also continuous with any contemporary form of communal leadership. One possible precedent that may spring to mind is the figure of a traditional tribal chief. It is invoked by Watt in order to explain the fact that Muḥammad is said to be entitled to a fifth of all spoils (Kor 8, 41).[59] A further potential precedent, cursorily suggested by Walid Saleh, is that of the late antique holy man.[60] Although the context in which Saleh puts forward this idea is Muḥammad's portrayal in the *sīra* literature rather than in the Qurʾān, the fact that the Medinan suras credit the Messenger with the ability to pray and intercede for the Believers is certainly reminiscent of late antique Christian saints and ascetics.[61] Finally, in view of the Islamic tradi-

56 Cf. Kor 2, 93 (the Israelites' response to God's covenant) and 5, 7 (the response of the Qurʾānic Believers). The response "We hear and disobey/obey" also occurs in Kor 2, 285; 4, 46; and 24, 51. On the Israelites' and Christians' alleged violation of God's covenant, see Kor 2, 27.63-64.83-85; 3, 187; 4, 154-162; and 5, 12-14.70-71.

57 Kor 2, 40.47.122.231; 3, 103; 5, 7.11.20; see also the Meccan occurrences at 14, 6 and 35, 3.

58 Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press ("The Transformation of the Classical Heritage", 37), 2005, p. 125.

59 Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, p. 232: "It was customary in Arabia for the chief of a tribe to receive a quarter of the spoils, partly for his own use, but partly in order to perform certain functions on behalf of the tribe, such as looking after the poor and giving hospitality."

60 Walid A. Saleh, "The Arabian Context of Muḥammad's Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press ("Cambridge Companions to Religion"), 2010, p. 21-38, at p. 25.

61 See the discussion of some extant correspondences of late antique holy men from Egypt and Palestine in Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 67-73. Rapp notes that it "is not only the holy man who prays for his followers, but his correspondents also offer up prayers for him." *Ibid.*, p. 68. This might potentially shed light on Kor 33, 56, where the Believers are bidden to "pray for" the Prophet. However, given that the first part of the verse states

tion's agreement that there was a significant Jewish population at Medina, one may wish to look to Jewish institutions of religious leadership as a contextual background for the role and functions of Muḥammad in the Medinan Qur'ān. Indeed, the Qur'ān itself clearly testifies that Jewish religious leaders did fulfil some of the same functions as the Qur'ānic Messenger: Kor 5, 44 ascribes to the Jewish "rabbis (*rabbāniyyūn*) and scholars (*aḥbār*)" the task of "adjudicating" (*ḥakama*) among the Jews "according to what they have been entrusted with of God's Scripture," and the accusation voiced in Kor 9, 34 that the *aḥbār* "wrongfully consume people's possessions" and "hoard gold and silver" suggests that they had some measure of control over communal finances as well.[62]

It would be unconvincing to deny that the three potential precedents just enumerated are pertinent to understand the Medinan transformation in the Qur'ān's image of Muḥammad. Nonetheless, all of them yield at best a partial fit. Thus, neither tribal chieftains nor the rabbinate provide models for Muḥammad's sacerdotal function or for the Qur'ānic emphasis on comprehensive obedience to him; and ascetics and holy men, unlike the Medinan Muḥammad, did not have control of communal finances.[63] There is however a further paradigm of communal authority that deserves consideration. This is the figure of the Christian bishop, perhaps the most widespread late antique template of religiously based urban leadership.[64] As I shall now attempt

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that "God and His angels pray for (*yuṣallūna ʿalā*) the Prophet," *ṣallā* is here perhaps more appropriately rendered as "to bless" rather than as "to pray for." The importance of prayer for the remission of sins is emphasised in Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 73: "the prayers that were most valued were those for the lightening of the burden of one's sins."

62 On the precise significance of the terms *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār* see Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*," p. 270-271. *Pace* Zellentin, I am not convinced that the Qur'ān does imply a clear "hierarchy […] between regular rabbis and *aḥbār*." To my mind, the few Qur'ānic occurrences of the two terms (Kor 5, 44.63; 9, 31.34) do not preclude treating them as largely synonymous; the fact that Kor 9, 31.34 only name the *aḥbār* and not also the *rabbāniyyūn* is explicable in different ways than by positing, with Zellentin, that the former were the superiors of the latter. For example, the fact that Kor 9, 31 employs the former rather than the latter term might be due simply to its concatenation with the possessive pronoun *-hum*; to the best of my knowledge, the Qur'ānic corpus contains no occurrence of a sound plural (such as *rabbāniyyūn*) combined with a possessive pronoun (the reader is invited to double-check this claim). I do however accept Zellentin's assessment that the Qur'ān envisages the relationship between the *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār*, whatever that relationship may be, as equivalent to that obtaining between the *qissīsūn* and the *ruhbān*. *Ibid.*, p. 273.—On communal payments to the rabbis see *ibid.*, p. 270.

63 Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 219.

64 David M. Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 876-915, at p. 882: "Every

to demonstrate, it presents a host of close parallels to the Medinan Qur'ān's boosting of Muḥammad's status, authority, and range of functions.[65]

A key similarity between the Medinan Muḥammad and Christian statements about the episcopate consists in a shared stress on obedience. Bishops are to be obeyed: similarly to Kor 4, 80, the letters of Ignatius (martyred in the early second century CE) go so far as to equate obedience to the bishop with obedience to God.[66] In fact, the bishop is constructed as a locus of divine presence, thus recalling the "godward movement" of Muḥammad that David Marshall has detected in the Medinan suras.[67] For instance, Ignatius demands that "we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself" (*Letter to the Ephesians* 6), and the Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum*, an early church order that Holger Zellentin has recently brought to the attention of Qur'ānic scholars,[68] calls for the bishop to be honoured like God, "because the bishop sits for you in the place of God Almighty."[69] Furthermore, like the Qur'ānic Messenger, bishops are described as "moral exemplars" for their flock.[70] Thus, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* enjoins the bishop "to be an example to the people, because you also have Christ for an example. Be you then also a good example (*dmuṭā šappirṭā*) to the people."[71] Here, the Syriac expression

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city was expected to have a bishop."—Note that bishops could be presented as possessing, and in many instances undoubtedly did possess, features of ascetic holy men; see *e.g.* Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005, p. 260-268 (on the *Life of Rabbula*).

65 What follows discusses some material that is cursorily adduced already in Sinai, "The Unknown Known."

66 Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 27 and n. 13 (citing Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 6.1, *Letter to the Magnesians* 3.1-2; *Letter to the Trallians* 2.1; *Letter to Polycarp* 6.1).

67 Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, p. 164-175.

68 See Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*. I follow Zellentin in viewing the *Didascalia* as a document that is apt to illuminate the Christian traditions that may have been circulating in the Qur'ānic milieu, although not therefore a document that was necessarily a direct source of the Qur'ān.

69 Arthur Vööbus (ed. and transl.), *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, Louvain, Secrétariat du CorpusSCO ("Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium", 401-402 and 407-408), 1979, p. 103, lines 24-26 (Syriac text). See also *ibid.*, p. 112, lines 2-4 (Syriac text): "love the bishop as a father, and be afraid of him as of a king, and honor him as God."

70 Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," p. 877-878 and Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 27-28 (on Ignatius' description of the bishop as an *exemplarion*), p. 31 (on the imitation of the bishop in the *Didascalia*), and p. 170.

71 Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, p. 57, lines 20-22 (Syriac text).

dmuṭā šappirṭā forms a strikingly close equivalent of the Arabic phrase *uswatun ḥasanatun*, employed in Kor 33, 21.[72]

The scriptural origin of this idea of the bishop as a moral exemplar would seem to be a passage in the First Letter to Timothy (3, 1-7), which inter alia requires the bishop to be someone who "must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?" (3, 4-5) Viewed from this New Testamental vantage point, it is not surprising that the Medinan Qurʾān pays a good deal of attention to the domestic situation of the Messenger. In a sense, the entire community constitutes the bishop's household, for he is routinely cast as a paternal figure; according to the *Didascalia*, he is "your father after God"[73] and is to be loved and honoured accordingly.[74] Thus, the fact that Kor 33, 6 comes close to presenting Muḥammad as a paternal figure is likewise explicable as the assimilation of an episcopal trait. The same applies to the Medinan Qurʾān's stress on the proper etiquette of interacting with the Messenger, which creates an almost courtly aura around him: bishops are to be honoured like kings, demands the *Didascalia*.[75]

Late antique bishops, whose courts of law could even apply corporeal punishments, offer a parallel to the Messenger's adjudicatory role as well.[76] The range of cases brought before episcopal courts shows at least some overlap with the subject matter of Qurʾānic law and includes, according to one scholar, "questions of the proper division of an inheritance, questions of personal status, whether a person be considered slave or free, charges and counter charges

72 A Greek author might use the term *hypodeigma* to express the same notion. See Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 170.

73 Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, p. 103, line 21 (Syriac text). See also Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 31.

74 Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, p. 112, lines 2-4 (Syriac text): "love the bishop as a father, and be afraid of him as of a king, and honor him as God." Further references to the bishop as a father "after God," who is therefore worthy of love and honour, can be found *ibid.*, p. 81, lines 5-6 (Syriac text) and *ibid.*, p. 109, line 17 (Syriac text).

75 *Ibid.*, p. 110, lines 12-13 and *ibid.*, p. 112, lines 2-4 (Syriac text).

76 Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," p. 881-882; John C. Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 3 (1995), p. 143-167 (on corporeal punishments see p. 163-164). The bishop's duty to pass "judgement" (*dīnā*) among his flock is discussed in Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, p. 58 ff. of the Syriac text (chap. 5), p. 63 ff. (chap. 6), p. 87 (from chap. 7), p. 115 f. (end of chap. 9; *inter alia*, instructs laymen to "leave judgement in the hand of" the bishop), p. 121-124 (from chap. 10), and, in particular, p. 127 ff. (chap. 11).

of sexual misconduct, and accusations of abuse."[77] We may even note some overt phraseological parallels: just as sura 5 underlines the need to "judge according to" (*ḥakama bi-*) the Torah, Gospel, or "what God has sent down" (Kor 5, 41-50), so the *Didascalia* demands that bishops "judge sinners according to the Scripture" (*d-ak ktābē tehwōn dāynin le-aylēn d-ḥāṭṭin*);[78] and similar to the Qurʾānic censure of those who "seek the judgement of idols" (Kor 4, 60) or "the judgement of ignorance" (Kor 5, 50), so the *Didascalia* decrees that a Christian must not "go to the judgement (*dīnā*) of the pagans."[79]

Another traditional episcopal function that overlaps with the role of the Qurʾānic Messenger is the redistribution of charity.[80] According to Rapp, the "bishop's access to financial resources is the crucial distinction that sets him apart from the holy man."[81] Finally, bishops would in some cases take a leading role in confronting and converting pagans and Jews, whether by purely discursive means or by condoning and even instigating acts of violence against them.[82] Thus, the expulsion of the Medinan Scripturalists that is alluded to in Kor 33, 26-27 and Kor 59, 2-8 as well as the banning of those who "associate" other beings with God (*al-mušrikūn*) from the Qurʾānic sanctuary in Kor 9, 17-22.28 call to mind similar measures taken by late antique bishops, who made it their business to oust or forcibly proselytise groups and individuals whom they deemed to be beyond the pale of orthodoxy. For instance, bishop Rabbula of Edessa (d. 435) "destroyed several pagan temples, seized a synagogue for conversion into a church, and confiscated the meetinghouses and exiled the leaders of a variety of heterodox Christian sects."[83]

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77 Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts," p. 161.

78 Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, p. 71, line 17 (Syriac text).

79 *Ibid.*, p. 128, line 20. Cf. also Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts," p. 153. This command to eschew secular courts has its origin in 1 Corinthians 6, 1-6.

80 Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 223-226; Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," p. 879 and 885-886.

81 Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 219 (correcting "set" to "sets").

82 See Garth Fowden, "Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire A.D. 320-435," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 29 (1978), p. 53-78, and Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," p. 887-888 (with a summary list of cases in which bishops endorsed, were involved in, or even instigated violence against pagans and Jews, with further references). See also Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press ("Divinations"), 2009, p. 109, n. 5 (referencing a passage in the Zuqnin Chronicle "where a Chalcedonian bishop is said to have called his monks 'troops' as he deployed them for the persecution of local anti-Chalcedonians").

83 Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, p. 265-266.

In sum, the Medinan Muḥammad combines a range of tasks similar to that performed by late antique bishops, such as communal exhortation,[84] serving as a moral exemplar, arbitration and adjudication, the redistribution of wealth for charitable purposes, and confronting pagans and Jews, both discursively and violently. Interestingly, late antique bishops were also frequently portrayed as emulating Moses in his capacity of an ideally comprehensive leader combining spiritual, ethical, and political authority: Moses was "the biblical model *par excellence* for bishops, especially among Greek authors."[85] Thus, the fact that the Medinan Qurʾān continues the late antique habit of casting an eminent individual in the image of Moses could at least in part be rooted in the fact that episcopal leaders in particular would often map specific situations in their life onto situations in the life of Moses.[86]

In view of all these parallels, it would not be amiss to characterise the Qurʾānic Messenger as playing the role of an "overseer" (which is of course the literal meaning of the Greek word *episkopos*) of the spiritual and communal well-being of the Believers. Captivatingly, Kor 2, 143 and 22, 78 actually describe the Messenger as a "*šahīd* set up over" the Believers. While the term *šahīd* certainly has the literal meaning "witness," the two verses in question may well invoke the idea of episcopal oversight over the Believers.[87] Against the claim

84 Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," p. 885, who remarks that the bishop was "expected to be the leading preacher of his church." Many Medinan passages can certainly be seen as fulfilling such an exhortatory and paraenetic function.

85 Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 125-131 (quoting p. 125), according to which various bishops were designated as a "new Moses." See also Gaddis, *There Is No Crime*, p. 266 (on Rabbula, who is said to have "imitated" Moses "in everything"). For another example, see Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," p. 896: during the siege of Constantinople, bishop Sergius carries around the image of Christ "just as the first Moses cried towards God when he made the tabernacle to proceed before the people: 'Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered abroad, and all the ones who hate you run away'" (Numbers 10, 35).

86 Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 128.

87 I am therefore inclined to translate the relevant part of Kor 2, 143 as follows: "Thus We have made you a middle community so that you may be overseers of the people (*li-takūnū šuhadāʾa ʿalā l-nāsi*) and so that the Messenger may be an overseer over you (*wa-yakūna l-rasūlu ʿalaykum šahīdan*)." See also Kor 22, 78. Against this suggestion, one might point to Kor 4, 41 and 16, 89, where the Qurʾānic Messenger is described as a "witness against (*šahīd ʿalā*) these" in the sense of an eschatological witness for the prosecution. However, it cannot entirely be taken for granted that the term *šahīd* in Kor 2, 143 and 22, 78 is employed in the same sense as in Kor 4, 41 and 16, 89, for the former two verses would appear to envisage the presence of a *šahīd* as a divine favour: a *šahīd* conveys divine guidance (which is explicitly mentioned in Kor 2, 142) and is based on divine election (22, 78: *iǧtabākum*).

that the Medinan Muḥammad has a strong episcopal dimension it could be objected that Muḥammad is presented as leading the Believers in battle (*e.g.* Kor 3, 121-128), whereas late antique bishops did not normally play a properly military role. However, a breakdown of imperial order might force a bishop to step into the breach in this respect, too.[88]

The Qur'ānic Critique of the Christian Episcopate

Although the parallels presented above are numerous and specific, one may wonder whether we are entitled to assume that the institution of the Christian episcopate was sufficiently known in the Qur'ānic milieu in order to constitute a plausible template for the Medinan reconstruction of Muḥammad's image. In general terms, there is no reason to doubt that this could have been the case: despite the absence of evidence for institutionalised Christian congregations in the Ḥiǧāz, where I would continue to locate the Qur'ān's emergence,[89] there were bishops ministering to Arab Christian communities in the Ǧafnid sphere of influence, in al-Ḥīra, and in Naǧrān.[90] From there, some familiarity with the institution of the episcopate could certainly have radiated into the Ḥiǧāz. The post-Qur'ānic Islamic tradition implies as much, insofar as it depicts Muḥammad's grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib as having conversed with the bishop of Naǧrān by the Kaʿba.[91] In any case, whatever historical scenario one wishes to imagine, the Qur'ān itself corroborates that the Messenger and his audience, wherever they were located, were familiar with some form of Christian communal leadership. This evidence emerges from Holger Zellentin's recent

88 See Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," p. 891 and 896.

89 See Sinai, *The Qur'an*, p. 59-77.

90 See for instance Greg Fisher, Philip Wood *et al.*, "Arabs and Christianity," in *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, ed. Greg Fisher, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 276-372, at p. 315-316 (the Ǧafnid leader al-Ḥāriṯ b. Ǧabala requests the appointment of a bishop named Theodore), 350-357 (on the missionary work of the miaphysite bishop Aḥudemmeh in the Ǧazīra); Isabel Toral-Niehoff, "The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīra: An Arab Christian Community in Late Antique Iraq," in *The Qur'ān in Context*, eds Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, p. 323-347, at p. 335-336; Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, Washington, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1989, p. 374-378.

91 Henri Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale avant l'hégire*, Beirut, Imprimerie Catholique, 1928, p. 25. I am grateful to one of *Arabica*'s anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to this tradition. Of course, the story bears all the hallmarks of a hagiographic legend, yet it nonetheless throws interesting light on what post-Qur'ānic Muslims deemed historically credible.

and, in my view, convincing argument that the Qurʾānic references to a group of Christian dignitaries designated as *ruhbān* (Kor 5, 82; 9, 31.34) and to the corresponding institution of *rahbāniyya* (Kor 57, 27) should not be construed as denoting specifically monks and monasticism, as traditionally assumed, but rather as a general reference to communal "overseers," or bishops, whether these were celibate or married.[92] Based on Zellentin's work, an adequate rendering of the term *rahbāniyya*, whose consonantal root undeniably expresses the notion of fear, would have to be something like "communal oversight based on the fear of God." Zellentin compellingly relates this Qurʾānic choice of words to the fact that the *Didascalia* betrays a clear "association of bishops with both fear and awe."[93]

The sole Qurʾānic pronouncement on *rahbāniyya*, found in Kor 57, 27, merits closer examination in the present context.[94] The sequence of verses to which it belongs begins at Kor 57, 25: "In the past We sent our messengers with the clear proofs," the divine voice announces, and then goes on to list three of the Qurʾān's most prominent prophets: Noah, Abraham, and Jesus (Kor 57, 26-27). Immediately after adducing Jesus, Kor 57, 27 affirms that "We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy and the institution of God-fearing communal oversight that they originated (*wa-rahbāniyyatani btadaʿūhā*). We only prescribed it for them by way of seeking God's satisfaction (*mā katabnāhā ʿalayhim illā btiġāʾa riḍwāni Llāhi*), yet they did not observe it properly (*fa-mā raʿawhā ḥaqqa riʿāyatihā*)."[95] The ambivalence of this

92 Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*," p. 271-284.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 283-284.

94 See also the discussion of this passage in *ibid.*, p. 277-284.

95 I take it that *mā katabnāhā ʿalayhim* belongs together with *illā btiġāʾa riḍwāni Llāhi*, the combination of a negation with the exceptive particle *illā* being the standard Qurʾānic way of expressing "only." See Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, p. 325. Alan Jones' rendering "We did not prescribe it for them [but it arose] through desire for God's satisfaction" needlessly separates the negation from the following exceptive clause. The same construal is also found in Rudi Paret's German translation, who patches up the fragmented syntax resulting from it by various parentheses: "Wir haben es ihnen nicht vorgeschrieben. (Sie haben es) vielmehr (von sich aus) im Streben nach Gottes Wohlgefallen (auf sich genommen)." See Rudi Paret (transl.), *Der Koran*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2001[8], *ad* Kor 57, 27; the negation is also separated off in Zellentin, "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*," p. 278. Most likely, both Jones and Paret—two exceedingly accomplished Arabists—opt to treat *mā katabnāhā ʿalayhim* as a self-standing negation because they accept the traditional understanding of *rahbāniyya* as monasticism and assume that the Qurʾān could therefore not possibly have articulated even the limited and qualified endorsement of *rahbāniyya* that is implied by my reading.

statement is arresting. The Qurʾān's assertion that the institution of God-fearing communal oversight (assuming that this is indeed the meaning of the word *rahbāniyya*) was "devised" or "originated" by the Christians themselves might be taken to imply a lack of divine endorsement of it. At the same time, however, the term *rahbāniyya* is grouped together with two virtues that God "placed in the hearts" of Jesus' followers, and *rahbāniyya* is said to have been divinely mandated at least in a conditional sense, as a supererogatory manner of pleasing God. Thus, it is not the institution of *rahbāniyya* as such that is condemned but rather the Christians' corruption of it, their failure to "observe it properly"—an indictment that is most likely further detailed in Kor 9, 31.34, according to which the incumbents of the office of *rahbāniyya* are elevated to a quasi-divine status and are guilty of misusing communal funds.

According to Kor 57, 27 and other Qurʾānic statements, the Christian episcopate has proven a failure: Christian communal leaders have been mistaken for "lords beside God" (Kor 9, 31) and have been able to abuse their authority for selfish ends (Kor 9, 34). Given that Muḥammad's position is visibly modelled on the Christian episcopate, why would acceptance of the authority that the Medinan Qurʾān invests in him not similarly amount to adopting a human leader as a "lord beside God"? From the Qurʾānic perspective, of course, there is a crucial distinction between the Messenger and Christian communal overseers: the Messenger is himself a member of the sequence of prophets evoked in Kor 57, 26-27, rather than merely occupying a position of conventional human authority among the followers of one of these prophets. It would appear to be assumed that Muḥammad's direct revelatory link to God precludes a recurrence of the same ills for which Christian, and also Jewish, communal leaders are castigated in Kor 9, 31.34: Muḥammad's prophetic status is likely taken to rule out the misunderstanding that he might be a "lord beside God" and thereby come to blot out his divine sender, and also to ensure that he would immediately be taken to task for any dereliction of duty on his part (cf. Kor 3, 79). After all, the Qurʾān contains instances of surprisingly candid criticism of Muḥammad.[96] Needless to say, such close divine supervision of the Messenger does not translate into any humanly enforceable checks and balances on the plenitude of his power.

The Qurʾānic statement that the institution of *rahbāniyya* was "devised" by the Christians rebuffs the claim that the ecclesiastical hierarchy is, through the apostolic succession, directly continuous with the ministry of Jesus. Thus, the episcopate is, at best, an appendix to the series of divinely appointed

96 See especially Kor 80, 1-10 but also Kor 33, 37 (implying that Muḥammad was guilty of "fearing the people" more than God).

emissaries featuring in Kor 57, 25-27. Muḥammad, by contrast, constitutes the latest and, at least according to sura 33, the final and most eminent member of this prophetic sequence. That Muḥammad's authority towers above that of contemporary Christian leaders is also highlighted in sura 57's conclusion. It urges the audience to "fear God and believe in His Messenger, as a result of which He will give you a double portion of His mercy (*yu'tikum kiflayni min raḥmatihi*), will bestow upon you a light by which you can walk, and will grant you forgiveness" (Kor 57, 28). The verse's reference to a "double portion" of divine mercy stands in subtle contrast with the single portion of mercy that God, according to Kor 57, 27, has granted to the Christians.[97] The salvific significance of Muḥammad that is thrown into relief here is also asserted in the passage criticising Jewish and Christian leaders in sura 9: verses 31 and 34, condemning these leaders' alleged deification and their unjust appropriation of "people's possessions," form a frame around two verses invoking, like the conclusion of sura 57, God's "light" (Kor 9, 32) and the eminent position of Muḥammad: "It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the true religion to cause it to prevail over all other religion, even though the Associators detest it." (Kor 9, 33) To follow Muḥammad is to be bathed in divine light and to have unfettered access to God's guidance and forgiveness.[98] The Medinan Qur'ān betrays a triumphant sense that God has showered the Believers with grace by once again making Himself as fully accessible to humans as possible, through Muḥammad: "God has bestowed favour upon the Believers when He raised up among them a messenger from among themselves who recites to them His signs, purifies them, and teaches them the Scripture and wisdom, while they had previously been in manifest error." (Kor 3, 164) The Qur'ānic community is thus presented as being equipped with a model of leadership that is far superior to that of the Christians, despite its numerous phenomenological similarities to it. Appropriately, sura 57's final verse therefore reminds the "People of the Scripture" that they "have no power over any of God's grace, but that the grace is in the hand of God, to give to whom He wishes; and God's grace is abundant."

We thus find in the Medinan Qur'ān both an ascription of recognisably episcopal traits to Muḥammad and a critique of the institution of the episcopate as falling far short of the direct prophetic mandate and salvific significance that characterise Muḥammad. This critique is rooted in the fact that the Medinan

97 "We placed in the hearts of those who followed him [Jesus] compassion and mercy (*raḥmatan*) […]."

98 Cf. verses like Kor 4, 64; 47, 19 etc., discussed above, which charge the Messenger with praying for God's forgiveness.

Messenger, unlike a Christian bishop, does not owe his authority to being ordained by an ecclesiastical hierarchy; Muḥammad does not occupy an office that imparts authority independently of the person occupying it.[99] Because the authority of the Qurʾānic Messenger is grounded in his own prophetic charisma rather than being institutionally derived, he would not have been vulnerable to being upstaged by charismatic holy men, as Christian bishops were.[100] As a result of this crucial difference, the Qurʾānic Messenger does not simply adjudicate disputes on the basis of pre-given laws, whether Biblical or not, as bishops did,[101] but is capable of laying down law himself, like Moses. The underived, charismatically grounded authority of the Messenger also accounts for his ultimately very different relationship to Moses. Although a number of late antique bishops were described as a "new Moses,"[102] it is Moses, rather than any of the bishops in question, who retained paradigmatic status. Muḥammad, however, is at least in some respects elevated above Moses: he leads the list of prophets in Kor 33, 7, and God's covenant with Muḥammad's community supersedes previous covenants. Ultimately, this paved the way for Muḥammad to become, not just a perfect embodiment of the Mosaic paradigm, but a paradigm in his own right.

99 This formulation is inspired by Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 29: "spiritual authority can reside not just in the *person* of the bishop, but also in the episcopal *office* per se."

100 See Gwynn, "Episcopal Leadership," p. 889, who notes that "Antony the hermit, Symeon Stylites, and other great ascetics derived their influence from their personal holiness and charisma, not from the possession of clerical office."

101 Lamoreaux, "Episcopal Courts," p. 159-160.

102 See again Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 125-131.